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TO: Economic Affairs Interim Committee

FROM: Jean Branscum, MMA Executive Vice President

DATE: September 10, 2012

SUBJECT: Physician Licensing

I am delighted to provide a report on the actions taken since the June meeting of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee to explore solutions that could address concerns expressed about the current physician licensing process. The Montana Medical Association (MMA) has followed through on our commitment by convening and facilitating two meetings. More importantly, the various interested parties have actively participated making this a collaborative improvement project of the Board of Medical Examiners (BOME), MMA, MHA and the Montana Medical Staffing Association.

Physician Licensure Action Planning Meetings

Two meetings were held in July and August with active participation by all interested parties. The first meeting was designed as an action planning session with the aim to have solutions developed and commitments made to resolve the issues being experienced with the licensing process.

The meeting was productive with participants making a commitment to work together to develop a first class licensing process in Montana that is built with the customers in mind, including physician applicants, our communities recruiting these physicians, and our health care consumers. Specific suggestions for improving the licensing process included:

- Add a release to application form so department staff will talk with medical staff personnel
- Allow emails from physicians to permit release of information to medical staff personnel
- Set a specific deliverable and timeline (online applications, credit card payment, etc)
- Shorten current process timelines to reflect improvements already made by the BOME
- Re-evaluate primary source information – look at AMA
- Accept electronic, online forms for information verification
- Look at current process and requirements to see if each step and requirement brings value
- Be more transparent, make expectations known to public
- Tighten up 3/30/60/90 day timelines and have process timeline expectations
- Have prompt responses to calls and emails by staff – set a timeframe for a response

- Involve other organizations – to make movement happen and to use their expertise and resources
- Explore best practices from other states, like expedited licensure

The suggestions were presented to the BOME at their meeting in July and the BOME was very supportive, expressed an ongoing commitment to participate, and passed a motion to explore an expedited licensure process.

A second action planning meeting was held on August 23. The second meeting was designed to build a better understanding of the existing licensure process, an awareness of the credentialing process and tools used by hospitals, provide an overview of North Carolina's expedited licensure process, and identify specific actions steps. The action steps identified at this meeting related to modifying internal processes at the Department of Labor and Industry to enhance customer service and improve communications to physician applicants and other individuals who may be assisting physicians to become licensed. These included updating the application, letting applicants and interested parties know of the changes made, being more timely in letting applicants know when information is received and when more is needed, providing information on who to call if an individual experiences delays or difficulties, and having staff verify required information through online portals. The Department has been very responsive to the suggestions and most have been implemented.

In conclusion, the meetings have been very productive and the participants are committed to meeting again in October and on a regular basis to keep the communication channels open. In addition to the above suggestions, there is interest in the adoption of an expedited licensing process for qualified applicants. It is our hope that the BOME will complete the drafting of administrative rules related to expedited licensure in the Fall and file a rule notice by the end of the year that would allow for this licensing option.

Your attention to the matter of physician licensure is greatly appreciated. While there is no recommendation for legislative action, the actions already taken by the Economic Affairs Interim Committee were instrumental in getting interested parties working together to find ways to improve the licensure process. Having a competent physician workforce in Montana is important. Having an adequate number of competent physicians is also important. We are confident the licensing process improvements identified can lead to a speedier process, getting competent physicians to work more quickly in our communities without compromising any public protections.